



1-1-1971

## *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations* Stephen R. Covey

Harold Glen Clark

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Clark, Harold Glen (1971) "*Spiritual Roots of Human Relations* Stephen R. Covey," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol11/iss1/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

STEPHEN R. COVEY. *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1970. 351 pp. \$4.95.

(Reviewed by Harold Glen Clark, professor of education and Dean of the College of Continuing Education at Brigham Young University. A recipient of the Brigham Young University Distinguished Service Award, Dr. Clark is author of *Millions of Meetings* (1956), and *The Art of Governing Zion* (1966), and has published in *The Improvement Era*.)

As you peruse this book, you are seized with the desire to rush your wife into reading it, or you wish your friend, the bishop, had a copy of it, or perhaps the school counselor, or your married children. "How many of the foibles of our Latter-day Saint friends could be alleviated through the principles set forth in this book," you say to yourself.

However, on reading more reflectively, you find yourself saying, "Why, he's talking to me. I think I had better try his approach." The spiritual roots with which the author is concerned are the spiritual roots with which the reader should

concern *himself*. Over and over again, the theme of self-improvement repeats itself in the book with the scripture, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." There seems to be a deliberate aim to have the individual smother his desire to repent of his wife's frailties, or those of his children and his friends, and get down to the business of "What spiritual roots can I do something about in myself?"

The behavioral rather than the definitional or logistic approach used throughout is impressive and stimulating, continually tying us back to understandable typical Latter-day Saint spiritual roots. The language used is natural, full of imagery and communicative. These few "*Coveyisms*" illustrate the style:

A man could know a great deal about God and yet not know God.

Private victory precedes public victory.

Starve the false and feed the true.

Overcome the gravity of habit.

They don't doubt the Gospel, but they doubt themselves.

Becoming all things to all people, one eventually becomes nothing to everybody.

A person has worth apart from his performance, good or bad.

We must never be too busy sawing, to take time to sharpen the saw.

One should not get the impression that the book is a collection of truisms and tidbits of knowledge acquired by the writer over his years as a teacher, bishop, mission president, and parent. His conclusions and summary statements and admonitions carry feeling and conviction growing out of experience, research, and scholarship in human relations.

Since my field is continuing education, I was impressed with his statement on the purpose of continuing education for adults. He concludes that this kind of education, necessarily made up of formal courses or classes, is the acquisition of knowledge, the overriding purpose; because we cannot hope to keep up with the vast amount of knowledge being poured out upon us. The depth and logic of his reasoning is "seen in his insistence that continuing education is self-education," and its main purpose is "to keep us intellectually alive, to renew

ourselves, and to learn how to learn, how to adapt and how to change and what not to change." Any effort to keep the spiritual roots of human relations healthy and strong must be based on a system of self-education or some external disciplinary plan, in order to give the adult confidence and competence. It just doesn't come by haphazard and wishful thinking.

In harmony with the title, spiritual root after spiritual root is presented in more than 350 pages. One wonders if too much is attempted and if the reader does not feel inundated with so much behaviorism which attempts to cover the whole waterfront. Just when you think you have cornered an opinionated conclusion or an over-enthusiasm of a gospel principle, he brings to bear upon that principle, a scripture to substantiate the point. For example, the listening attitude toward prayer is delicately and effectively handled, but much is made over pre-preparation in order to make prayer more effective. True, many of our prayers are stereotyped, but even our prayers full of cliches are still *our* prayers with some good being accomplished. The author then jolted me out of my lethargy with the scripture, "And likewise, also it is counted evil unto man if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such" (Moroni 7:9). Thus is driven home to the reader a spiritual root labeled "real intent of the heart," without which all else is profitless. This practice of quoting the right scriptural reference is part of what makes the book most acceptable.

Skill is employed in touching upon our foibles, and laying them on the line, but leaving us more encouraged than offended. For example, you begin to feel that he was right when he said that a man could know a great deal about God and yet not know God. The sometimes "agonizing admissions" about oneself, always seem to end up in the commitment to do something about the basic cause of our sinning.

New understandings about first principles make the reading intensely motivating.

Great skill is shown in applying great principles to our work-a-day lives. Who else, for example, would ask the question, "Why is the atonement of Christ important to your marriage?" And how many would attempt to answer it with meaning and specificity? The atonement is a spiritual root to Covey. "No permanent marriage," he argues, and "no eternally

harmonious celestial marriage can be found outside the spirit and the fact of the atonement of Christ." In the spirit of the writer, one is dealing with the leaves instead of getting down to the roots if he leaves out the atonement of Christ and its implications for good human relations. He is giving his life the aspirin treatment instead of working on basic causes. "We draw from His suffering and His love," Covey goes on to say, "inward security and willingness to accept the risks of understanding and loving freely, non-defensively, and without prejudging or asking for something in return."

And so the author fills the pages with spiritual root after spiritual root, reminding us again and again of the heart stuff which we must do something about, "for out of it are the issues of life."

It will be difficult for anyone—the parent, teacher, missionary or administrator—who reads this book with real intent, not to be moved to some kind of spiritual aerobics.